

# Capacity-Building Guide for Founding Native American Charter Schools

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NATIONAL  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
RESOURCE CENTER





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# Introduction

Opening a Native American charter school is a viable option for tribal communities to engage in and support sovereignty and self-determination in education for Native Americans.<sup>1,2</sup> A significant advantage of charter schools is that they afford the autonomy required for Native American communities to establish schools that are rooted in their cultural values, languages, traditions, and ways of knowing. However, establishing a Native American charter school requires extensive research, resources, and time.

Since the inception of the public school system and, more importantly, the Indian Boarding Schools, the education of Native American students was largely an intentional means to assimilate Native American people. Through Indian Boarding Schools, Native Americans have witnessed many traumatic effects that continue to impact Native perceptions and perspectives around education. As Native American students have transitioned into mainstream public schools, the education and information provided still does not reflect Native communities, families, and the tribes that Native students represent. In essence, the cultures, histories, languages, traditions, knowledge ways, and values are not being integrated and understood to provide a more inclusive learning environment for Native American communities, families, tribes, and, most of all, students.

Thus, Native American charter schools provide a means for Native American communities, tribes, and stakeholders to intentionally create a learning environment that honors the distinctive cultures, histories, languages, traditions, knowledge ways, and values of particular communities and/or tribes. Native American charter schools can also be designed to intentionally connect knowledge learned by students to stewardship in their communities and/or tribes. The Native American charter school provides a direct means for communities and tribes to determine what, where, why, when, and how Native American students learn. Although Native American charter schools must adhere to the authorizer's accountability and evaluation procedures and protocols, the charter school option provides Native American communities and tribes the ability to engage in tribal sovereignty and self-determination through educational sovereignty.

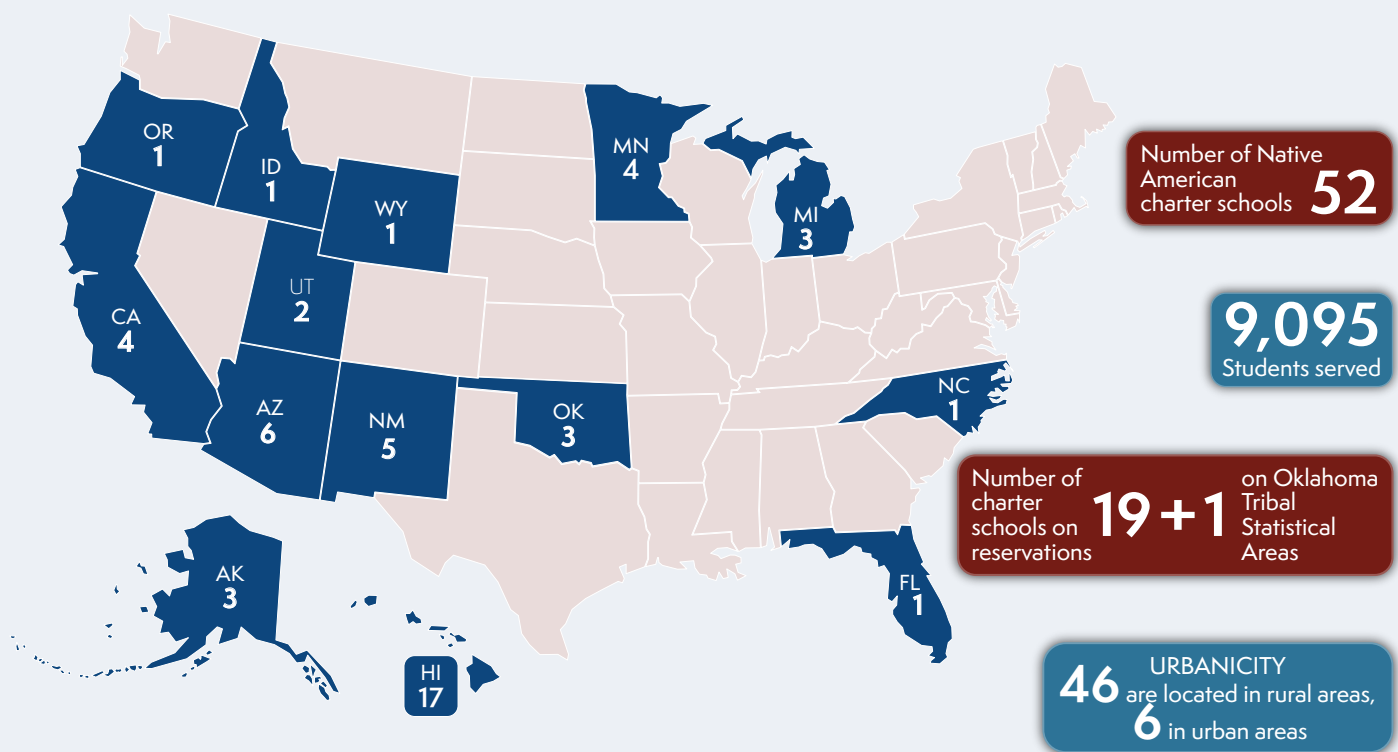
For more information on designing Native American charter schools that incorporate cultural responsiveness, see the **National Indian Education Association's** (NIEA) "[Sovereignty in Education: Creating Culturally-Based Charter Schools in Native Communities](#)." NIEA has developed a framework to promote the growth and expansion of Native American charter schools to ground charters in Native ways of knowing, believing, and operating to provide an educational avenue that many Native peoples have sought for decades.

<sup>1</sup> National Indian Education Association (NIEA), 2018

<sup>2</sup> National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), 2018

## NATIONAL LANDSCAPE OF NATIVE AMERICAN CHARTER SCHOOLS<sup>a</sup>

- **Charter school:** A charter school is a public school that operates as a school of choice with greater autonomy than traditional public schools in terms of educational programming. Charter schools have to commit to meeting specific educational objectives, such as meeting student performance requirements, in return for a charter to operate a school. Charter schools are exempt from significant state or local regulations related to operation and management that are required of traditional public schools, but otherwise adhere to the regulations of public schools. For example, charter schools cannot charge tuition, deny enrollment in ways that violate civil rights, or be affiliated with a religious institution.<sup>b</sup>
- **Native American charter school:** NIEA defines a Native American charter school this way (Kahumoku III, 2018): [It is] a publicly funded independent school established by a tribe or Native organization under the terms of a charter with a local or national authority for the purpose of expanding culture- and language-based educational opportunities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. Such schools provide an educational environment that values and integrates Native ways of being and knowing—language, values, practices, knowledge, and belief systems—with contemporary curricular content and approaches to improve the well-being of students. In addition, many Native American charter schools also offer educational and familial programs, opportunities, and supports to its communities, families, and students. Native American charter schools are typically located on or near tribal lands.



<sup>a</sup> To identify Native American charter schools, we used 2019-2020 data on charter schools from the [Common Core of Data](#) to identify charter schools with at least 25% of their students identified as Native American, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander or to identify charter schools located on reservations. Ninety-one charter schools met at least one of these criteria. We then checked each of these school’s websites to see if the school mission or school vision mentioned Indigenous languages, cultures, or ways of knowing as central to the school’s purpose. This reduced the potential sample to 52 schools. This figure does not include Native American charter schools that opened after the 2019-2020 school year. This figure also does not include Native American charter schools that have had their charters approved but have yet to open.

<sup>b</sup> For more information on what a charter school is, check out this resource provided by the National Charter School Resource Center: [What is a Charter School?](#)

While Native American charter schools are a promising schooling option, there are many important steps required to successfully establish a charter school. It is essential that the charter school has a clear mission and vision which is determined and guided by the input and needs of the community as well as by the tribal educational stakeholders that form the charter school's founding team. The founding team will also engage in the lengthy process of submitting a charter school application to an authorizer within their state. The application process can take up to a year of concerted planning to complete.<sup>3</sup> If the charter is approved, the founding team then needs startup funds to secure a facility, hire staff, and start school operations. Based on the experiences of charter schools that are already in operation, it takes approximately one to two years of intensive planning to successfully launch a charter school after the charter application has been approved.<sup>4</sup>

**This resource guide provides prospective Native American charter school founders, and those interested in supporting their efforts, with perspective on three capacities essential for opening a Native American charter school: founding team capacity, funding capacity, and compliance capacity.** Granted, the skills required to open a charter school are far too many to enumerate; however, we identified these capacities after conducting a listening session with Native American communities across the country and then reviewing state and national resources on charter startup. This guide unpacks key capacities that are core to founding a charter school, and, though not comprehensive, we provide links to other resources that can provide more guidance on additional topics related to charter startup.

For each capacity, we discuss some of the common challenges and strategies that a literature search revealed regarding the establishment of a charter school. We also provide case studies of an urban and a rural Native American charter school, Native American Community Academy (NACA) and Walatowa High Charter School (WHCS), to illustrate how each school realized these capacities. Both schools are located in New Mexico and are examples of Native American charter schools that have persevered and continue to provide culturally and linguistically responsive educational experiences that are grounded in community and tribal input, voice, and values. Recognizing that all states have varying charter authorizing policies and procedures and recognizing the differences between urban charter schools and rural charter schools, the case studies highlight different approaches based on the authorizer, community/tribal affiliation, and location. We close with guidance on building vital relationships with the broader ecosystem to ensure that Native American charter schools have the ability to access necessary resources.

<sup>3</sup> See [resources](#) produced by the Colorado League of Charter Schools for some timelines on the charter founding process.

<sup>4</sup> See [resources](#) produced by the Charter Support Unit for more details on important steps for opening a charter school once the charter application has been approved.

## FEATURED NATIVE AMERICAN CHARTER SCHOOLS

### Native American Community Academy (NACA)

NACA, located in Albuquerque, New Mexico, was founded in 2006 and serves grades K-12. NACA provides a culturally responsive education to more than 540 students, representing more than 60 tribal nations. Given the large number of tribes it serves, it seeks to develop identity through culture and language, holistic wellness, community and family, Indigenous thought, and rigorous academics. NACA is a district-chartered school under the authorizing authority of the Albuquerque Public Schools.\*



\* A district charter school is a charter school that is authorized by the local school district. The school district, also considered a local educational agency (LEA), holds the charter school accountable for the contents of the school's charter agreement and decides whether the school is renewed or closed when the term of the charter expires.

### Walatowa High Charter School (WHCS)



WHCS, located in Jemez Pueblo, New Mexico, was founded in 2002. WHCS is approximately 50 miles outside of Albuquerque in a more remote, rural setting.

WHCS serves grades 9–12 and provides a culturally responsive education to approximately 60–70 students, primarily from the Pueblos of Jemez and Zia. However, they also have students of various backgrounds that live within the Jemez Valley corridor. Currently, it is a state-chartered school under the authorizing authority of the New Mexico Public Education Commission.\* However, at its inception, WHCS was authorized by a local school district, Jemez Valley Public Schools.

\* A state-chartered school is a charter school that is authorized by its state education agency (SEA), which in this case is the New Mexico Public Education Commission. With state-chartered schools, the SEA holds the charter school accountable for the contents of the school's charter agreement and decides whether the school is renewed or closed when the term of the charter expires.

# Building Founding Team Capacity

A charter school's founding team is composed of motivated stakeholders who take the initiative to apply for and open a charter school that they feel will meet the needs of their students and communities. As such, the founding team will make key decisions that will determine the school's governance once the charter school opens. This includes determining procedures for how future school board members will be nominated and selected, the role of parents and the community in school governance, procedures for how committees are formed and structured, and criteria for nominating and selecting the school leader.<sup>5</sup> Founding members also make key decisions about the leadership, curricula, pedagogies, and discipline policies that will shape the culture of the school, such as centering Native culture and language in its learning philosophy. When the school opens, the charter school will be run by the school board. Founding team members may transition to the school board, but this is not a requirement.

There is no set limit to the size of a Native American charter school's founding team, but it is essential that the founding team has the combined capacity to address all aspects required to open and operate a charter school and is knowledgeable about community and/or tribal strengths and needs. Founding teams require expertise in academics, school leadership, finance and accounting, law, human resources, procuring facilities, marketing and fundraising, and community partnerships and relations.<sup>6</sup> In addition, founding teams must include representatives that understand the community and tribal cultural beliefs, knowledge, and values. Although there is no set formula to determine the size of the founding team, some sources advise that a founding team can vary between 9 and 15 members, depending on school need and available social capital.<sup>7,8,9</sup> It is important, though, that the founding team is large enough to cover all bases and meet the needs of the community while also not being impeded by its size.

Often, one of the founding team members, "the founder," is the central leader behind the inception of the charter school. The founder typically becomes the school's first leader. Once the school opens, the school leader will be responsible for managing the charter school, fulfilling the school's mission, and realizing the goals and priorities set by the board. School leaders often have some autonomy regarding curriculum, programs, and hiring staff. The school board, though, will make key decisions about the school's governance and performance goals and will evaluate the school leader's progress towards these goals.<sup>10</sup> It is crucial that the school board and the school leader fulfill their roles of governing and managing the charter school, respectively.

Founding members should be prepared to devote at least 10-15 hours each month before the charter school opens, but the school's founder and other central leaders will need to spend more time to ensure the charter

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<sup>5</sup> One key difference between charter schools and traditional public schools is the school board. The school board is an organized group of volunteers that are ultimately held responsible by the charter school authorizer for following compliance regulations and meeting student performance requirements. See this [FAQs](#) for a common list of FAQs on the role of the school board and charter school governance. Education Board Partners has also explicated [standards](#) for effective charter school governance.

<sup>6</sup> Cannata et al., 2014

<sup>7</sup> For more information on charter school governance, see this [FAQ](#).

<sup>8</sup> Cannata et al., 2014

<sup>9</sup> See Raíces Del Saber Xinachtli Community School for an example of a [founding team](#) for a Native American charter school.

<sup>10</sup> Cannata et al., 2014



school is opened.<sup>11</sup> Initially, founding team members will need to spend considerable time establishing relationships with community members and local stakeholders to evaluate their needs and determine how the charter school will meet these needs. It is vital that the founding team establishes a school's mission and vision to reflect the desires and needs of the communities being served, such as forming a mission that values cultures, customs, and Native languages. The mission statement should be community and/or tribally derived to demonstrate how learning and academic achievement will happen through integrating tribal cultures, histories, knowledge, languages, and values throughout schooling processes. The school's mission will also be used to guide decisions ranging from the selection of the school's educational materials to the hiring criteria for school leaders and teachers.

Native American charter school, Endazhi-Nitaawiging Charter School, whose application was recently approved, had founders that included local educators who were fluent in Ojibwe (their Native language), the CEO of the Boys and Girls Club, a tribal grant writer, a tribal secretary, and community members versed in the tribe's ceremonies.<sup>12</sup> The success of this charter school application highlights the importance of selecting a founding team that reflects the culture and values of the communities being served.

**“Don't teach me my culture, but use my culture to teach me.”**

–Benny Shendo, member of the Jemez Pueblo Tribe\*

\* Kohu-Morgan, 2021



## **ENDAZHI-NITAAWIGING CHARTER SCHOOL** “THE PLACE WHERE IT GROWS CHARTER SCHOOL”

### **Gikinoo' Amawishin Miinawaa Inga-Gikendaas** “Teach me and I will know.”

**Mission:** To prepare each student for college with an enhanced knowledge of the Ojibwe language, culture, leadership, and environmental stewardship.

**Vision:** Endazhi-Nitaawiging's vision is to create confident leaders grounded in their true inherent identities and to ensure that they are academically, socially, and spiritually prepared to positively change the community and world.

Endazhi-Nitaawiging will open in Fall 2022, enrolling students in grades K-5, and will add a grade each year until 2025-26, expanding to students in grades K-8.

Founding team members will also need to review the charter school laws in their state to prepare their charter school application, which will be reviewed by a state authorizer. Writing the charter school application is an intensive process stretching over multiple months, as founders will need to detail for authorizers their plans for school governance, finance and facilities, school operations, student recruitment, and discipline policies. Founding team members typically have full-time jobs throughout the process and will need to be creative and resourceful in finding the time to both connect with local stakeholders and keep the charter school on track for approval and opening.

The founding team is also responsible for writing and executing the *succession plan* that will transition the charter school from the approval of the charter application to full operation. Once the school opens,

<sup>11</sup> Cannata et al., 2014

<sup>12</sup> For more information on the Endazhi-Nitaawiging Charter School, see this [article](#).

the charter school board oversees school governance, so it is essential that the founding team establishes a viable succession plan that transfers leadership from the founding team to the board. One foundation recommends that the succession plan be drafted and fully executed within one year of the charter school’s opening.<sup>13</sup> However, community dynamics and local exigencies may delay this transition until after the charter school has opened. The school’s governing board will then review and potentially revise the charter’s long-term *strategic plan* with the founding team. This plan, which will be largely specified in the charter application, will define goals for the growth and expansion of the charter school (e.g., Will the charter school expand one grade level at a time?). The strategic plan will also provide guidance and goals for student recruitment and community engagement, the school’s budget, operations, hiring and talent management, finance and fundraising, and school leader evaluation and support.

Figure 1 below outlines the barriers that many founding teams encounter in pursuing the creation of a new charter school, as well as common strategies that founding teams have used to overcome these challenges.

Figure 1: Common Challenges and Strategies for Building Founding Team Capacity

Common Challenges	Strategies to Overcome Challenges
<p><b>Insufficient market research:</b> Charter schools, both in general and when opening, can fail if there isn’t sufficient community need for the school or if it doesn’t reflect the cultural values of the communities being served.</p>	<p><b>Conduct a needs assessment of the community and/or tribe(s) to determine specific areas of need</b> and families’ desires and interests in enrolling their student(s) in your potential school. One of the key challenges facing many Native American communities is getting accurate data on community needs. The founding team may need to establish database hubs to document the needs of the community.</p> <p><b>Ensure that the community and/or tribe are explicitly and intentionally surveyed</b> to include their ideas, opinions, and voice in what they would like in a charter school.</p> <p><b>Design a school mission and programming that reflect the unique needs and strengths</b> of the communities and tribes being served.</p>
<p><b>Insufficient founding expertise:</b> Operating a charter school involves much more than instructional knowledge. It is imperative that the founding team has expertise in finance, governance, academics, fundraising, and facilities.</p>	<p><b>Conduct an audit of the founding team</b> to ensure that the founding team members have expertise in finance, governance, academics, fundraising and marketing, and facilities, and recruit accordingly. Seek external expertise if there are any gaps.</p> <p><b>Select founding team members that reflect the school’s mission and cultural values</b> in addition to the more technical aspects of operating a charter school.</p>
<p><b>Insufficient strategic plan:</b> Absence of a long-term strategic plan to ensure that the charter school board is supporting the school in adhering to the charter agreement with the authorizer can lead to ineffective school governance and management, as there are not clear priorities to guide the charter school.</p>	<p><b>Establish the school mission and vision and use these tools to guide central decisions.</b> The mission and vision must reflect the impetus for the creation of the school from the founders’ and community’s voice and needs.</p> <p><b>Develop long-term plans and goals</b> using tools such as the <a href="#">Logic Model Toolkit</a> and <a href="#">SMART Objectives Toolkit</a>, including goals for program delivery and financial development.</p> <p><b>Support the future governance and management of the charter school by establishing guidance and procedures for how future school board members will be nominated and selected.</b> Provide guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the various school board committees to address finance, performance, operations, academics, fundraising, recruitment, community engagement, and facilities.</p>

<sup>13</sup> For more information on charter school governance and guidance on succession plans, check out this [resource](#) provided by the Bluum organization.

## NATIVE AMERICAN CHARTER SCHOOL CASE STUDY:

### BUILDING THE FOUNDING TEAM

It is vital that charter schools have a core group of people to create and convey a unified mission and vision for the existence of a charter school. For Native American charter schools, it is also imperative that founders understand the unique needs and values of the Native American communities they wish to serve. Both NACA and WHCS shared that the diversity of the founding team is essential to ensuring that the charter school is built on strong, community-centered foundations.

NACA, located in an urban setting, had access to founding team members who recognized and wanted to shift the educational landscape through a social justice lens to serve Native American students from different tribes throughout the Albuquerque region. Given its urban location, NACA established a founding team that represented various backgrounds and experiences, including business professionals, community members, educators, professors, and lawyers. This was crucial in creating a diverse team that could engage various networks, perspectives, and viewpoints. NACA leaders were able to leverage these relationships to ensure that long-term plans addressed all aspects of opening and operating a charter school.

WHCS also focused on recruiting a diverse group of experts and professionals to form its founding team; however, its rural setting within the tribal community of Jemez Pueblo made it crucial that the founding members understood the unique needs of the tribe, families, and students. The founding team at WHCS sought guidance and input from tribal leaders and tribal departments to understand the unique needs of the tribe. WHCS also had the added responsibility of assuring tribal leaders that founding team members represented the tribal beliefs, knowledge, and values when shifting toward a community-based education approach. Founding members had to become advocates for this “new” type of school, as it was only the second Native American charter school in New Mexico and the first high school. Hence, it was vital that WHCS embodied the culture of the Jemez Pueblo while also enriching postsecondary opportunities for its students.

Ultimately, both schools incorporated team members who understood the value of tribal community, tribal families, and tribal life, and all founding team members sought an equitable and community-derived means of delivering educational services.



# Building Funding Capacity

With 46% of all charter schools closing for financial reasons, understanding the nuances of the charter funding structure and developing the capacities to effectively budget, fundraise, and conduct ongoing financial operations are crucial to building a strong foundation for your charter school.<sup>14</sup> In addition, charter startup requires a significant amount of fundraising prior to state and federal funding kicking in. A school may need to secure an estimated \$300,000–\$500,000 prior to the school receiving state per-pupil funding or federal Title funding.<sup>15</sup>

## Charter School Funding Structure

Charter schools are independently run, publicly funded entities. They receive their primary funding in the form of per-pupil revenue, or specific dollar amounts associated with the number of students enrolled in the school. Processes for determining and distributing per-pupil funding are set at the state level and can vary significantly, with some states calculating funding based on district revenues and others setting a flat per-pupil amount or formula applied to all schools in the state.<sup>16</sup> In some instances, charter schools are able to share the costs of transportation and facilities with their local district, but this is not always the case.<sup>17</sup>

As public schools, charter schools are also eligible to receive federal funding, but the delivery of that funding depends on whether a charter school is considered a local education agency (LEA) in the state. Charter schools that are considered LEAs apply for this funding directly, while schools that are not considered LEAs receive this funding as a portion of their local district allocations.<sup>18</sup> See more detail about federal funding in [Appendix A](#).

Reliance on per-pupil funding as the primary budget driver leaves many schools short of the funds needed to start and maintain a school. The previously mentioned state and federal funding are not received until closer to the start of the school year, so charter schools need additional revenue streams for startup and to sustain the school beyond the first year. To address funding shortages, there are some additional funding streams charter schools can access to supplement per-pupil funding:

- **State Supplemental Grants:** Some states provide grants for charter startup and additional funding or financing options for charter facilities. States receiving state entity (SE) grants from the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter School Programs Office (CSP) offer subgrants annually for charter startup. To determine if your state holds an SE grant and thus offers subgrant competitions for charter startup, locate your state on [this map](#). Further information about these grants and additional funding for other startup aspects, such as facilities, can be found on state department of education websites.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cannata et al., 2014

<sup>15</sup> Check out the following [resource](#) for how to open a charter school. The Walton Family Foundation also provides [charter startup grants](#).

<sup>16</sup> [Click here](#) to see how your state funds charter schools.

<sup>17</sup> See [this state policy comparison](#) to identify which states require cost-sharing for transportation or facilities.

<sup>18</sup> See [Accessing Federal Programs – A Guidebook for Charter School Operators and Developers](#) for more on federal funding.

<sup>19</sup> For more on facilities funding options by state, see [A Synthesis of Research on Charter School Facilities](#) or [NACSA’s National Policy Index](#) (filtering for facilities funding options).

- **Competitive Federal Grant Programs for Charter Schools:** There are various grant programs charter schools can apply for that support early startup and capital. Additional federal funding programs can be found in [Appendix A](#).
  - For charter developers in states *without* SE grants, [CSP provides Charter School Developer grants](#) to individuals or organizations in the process of opening a charter school or replicating and expanding a high-quality charter school.<sup>20</sup> Funds can be used for activities such as professional development and hiring during the planning period; acquiring supplies, training, and educational materials; carrying out necessary renovations; one-time start-up costs; and community engagement activities. In 2020, grantees’ total expected funding awarded ranged from \$299,988–\$1,495,312.<sup>21</sup> Learning Point Alaska, a nonprofit agency operated by Sea Lion Corporation which is a federally recognized Alaska Native tribal organization in the Hooper Bay village, received a CSP Developer Grant to support charter startup activities in 2020.<sup>22</sup>
  - The [Office of Indian Education \(OIE\)](#) offers a host of programs supporting Native education including [the Native American Language Grant](#) for developing or using Native American language programs, [the Indian Education Professional Development grants program](#) for supporting the training of Native teachers and school administrators, and [the Demonstration Grants for Indian Children \(DEMO\)](#) for supporting the development of programs to improve educational attainment of Native students. The Alaska Native Heritage Center received a DEMO grant in 2020 to implement the Tiamuna Project, which helped create a dual-credit, early-honors program at Alaska Native Cultural Charter School (ANCCS) through a partnership with Alaska Pacific University (APU), a tribally controlled, Alaska Native-serving college.<sup>23</sup>
- **National and Community Foundations/Nonprofits:** Many foundations provide funding to the charter sector, some on a national basis and some on a local basis. These grants range from charter startup to funding for ongoing programming.<sup>24</sup> See this [list of funding opportunities](#) for more.
- **Philanthropic Individuals and Groups:** Fundraising from individuals and groups can provide another stream of revenue for charter schools. These funds may have the fewest restrictions of any supplemental funding source. Involving the community in funding the school can also build a base of support and engagement.
- **Native-Specific Funding Sources:** Many national and community-based organizations offer funding specific to Native American communities, some with very specific purposes or regions of service. It is helpful to network with your community and other Native American organizations to identify potential funders, especially as some do not allow for open applications but instead invite parties to apply. See a current list of Native American grant opportunities [here](#).

<sup>20</sup> View [this map](#) to see if your state does not currently hold an SE grant, and therefore you are eligible to apply for a CSP developer grant.

<sup>21</sup> Use [this map](#) to see if charter school developers in your state are eligible for CSP Developer Grants.

<sup>22</sup> See the [project abstract](#) for Learning Point Alaska, Inc. from CSP for an example of a charter school developer grant for Native American charter schools.

<sup>23</sup> See this [link](#) for DEMO grantees from FY 2016 through FY 2020.

<sup>24</sup> The Walton Family Foundation also provides [charter startup grants](#).

# Key Capacities Needed to Establish Healthy Startup Funding

As charter schools are responsible for handling their own financial operations and derive funding from a combination of sources, strategic budgeting and financial management, ability to fundraise, and attention to compliance are important for sustained financial health.

## *Strategic budgeting*

The ability to properly manage finances and plan for the future will be key to the success of your charter school. Strategic budgeting and financial management ensure that the school can fund facilities, staff salaries and benefits, program needs, long-term investments, and unforeseen costs year-to-year and in the long run.

- **Estimating your costs:** Typically, charter school expenses include categories such as personnel (administrative staff, instructional staff, employee benefits), purchased services, food services, transportation, special education services, annual audits, materials and supplies, computers and information technology, capital outlay, and an authorizer fee (if applicable).<sup>25</sup> You can research local vendors' prices and facilities costs as well as the budgets of other similar charter schools to help estimate costs.<sup>26</sup>
- **Projecting enrollment and revenues:** Projecting and meeting enrollment targets is the foundation for a charter school's financial viability. Ensure that you are realistic in your enrollment estimates, as this will impact your understanding of how much your budget can cover. Though per-pupil funding will account for a significant portion of your school's revenue, the per-pupil funding formulas do not account for startup costs and will not be delivered before the school is open. Once you identify your enrollment projections, pursue your enrollment targets through strategic recruitment efforts that make sense for your community. For example, NACA identified and recruited Native American students within the Albuquerque Public School District and the surrounding districts through direct and intentional community-based communication and forums that outlined the mission and vision of the school. When you have an idea of the amount of state per-pupil and federal Title and IDEA funding you may receive, you can then estimate how much additional revenue will be needed and strategize how you will fill that gap with different funding methods. Each funding stream will come with its own use restrictions, so ensure you are budgeting and planning accordingly.
- **Aligning budgeting decisions to mission and school needs:** Distinguish between desired versus essential costs. Are you spending in areas of most need for your school? How do your budgeting decisions align with your school's mission? Founders recommend tying mission-critical line items to per-pupil allocations and using grant or fundraising money for special or nonessential programs, if available. To ensure effective delivery of your program, planning for investment in teaching is also important, not only in salaries and benefits, but also in professional development and instructional leadership.<sup>27</sup> Native American charter schools need to consider staff training in their budgets given the

<sup>25</sup> For more related to budgeting and expenses, see this guide: <https://www.incschools.org/start-a-charter/paving-a-new-path/>

<sup>26</sup> Find some additional cost-estimation tools here: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/choice/charterschoolbootcamp>

<sup>27</sup> Cannata et al., 2014

imperative of culturally sustaining pedagogies and social justice leadership. To develop staff, Native American charter schools may consider providing scholarships to community members who are interested in teaching yet lack certification. For example, Central New Mexico College collaborates with NACA to provide training for pre-service teachers that is focused on developing cultural competencies and skills for engaging with tribal communities. Here, location matters, and founders will have to be resourceful in identifying local training that aligns with their charter school's mission.

## *Financial management expertise*

Financial compliance is important to the viability of your charter school in meeting accountability standards and facilitating healthy and sustainable financial systems. It is vital that charter schools have financial systems in place that readily retain information on funds, organize this information, and report on the usage of funds.

- **Financial systems and reporting:** It is imperative that your team understands the rules and regulations that govern the reporting of financial transactions, including Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). Your school must have or develop the capacity to properly record activities in an accounting system and reconcile bank statements. Each revenue source will have its own reporting and compliance requirements associated with it. For example, financial reporting and compliance required by an authorizer will cover the entirety of your financial systems, while reporting and compliance associated with a federal CSP grant or a foundation grant will focus on those specific funding streams and have reporting and compliance requirements related to how that funding is managed and spent. You will likely have to produce monthly and annual financial statements and participate in an annual audit. Your fiscal system may also be monitored, and you need to set your school up to succeed by following proper procedures.
- **Developing strong internal controls:** Schools must be able to adopt policies, processes, rules, and regulations to protect their financial assets. Internal controls provide the clear delineation of roles for individuals dealing with the authorization of purchases, the disbursement of funds, and legal compliance and reporting in order to reduce the opportunity for misappropriation or mishandling. Expecting the school leader, or any one person, to handle all business aspects of running your school is unrealistic and unmanageable.<sup>28</sup> Splitting these responsibilities among three or more individuals such as a business or operations manager, board treasurer, and external auditor is recommended to ensure that the same person is not responsible for all finance functions.
- **Effective financial management:** Proper financial management ensures that your charter school is viable, can pay for the programs needed to execute your mission and vision, can support and compensate staff, and is able to operate without accruing insurmountable debt. Effective financial management includes ensuring that funds are used for their appropriate purposes, managing a budget so as not to run into long-term debt, drawing down appropriate amounts of funds from federal and state sources at the appropriate times, effectively managing payroll, negotiating with vendors to avoid excessive costs, and identifying and avoiding predatory lending.

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<sup>28</sup> Cannata et al., 2014

## Fundraising

Developing internal capacity for fundraising will help you expand your school’s revenue base beyond traditional funding sources, which are often limiting to charter schools. Fundraising is especially important in the school startup phase to support school planning and operation prior to per-pupil funds kicking in.

- Goal setting and relationship building:** Strategic planning, outreach, and ongoing connections with organizations and individuals play a key role in expanding a school’s revenue sources. The Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools recommends creating a simple fundraising plan by defining fundraising goals, specifying how these funds would be used for specific purposes, detailing targets for each fundraising source (organizations, individuals, grants, etc.), identifying individuals in the founding team or community who are responsible for outreach and relationship management, and creating a calendar that breaks down a timeline of the steps and tasks needed to accomplish your fundraising goals. Once the plan is established, ensure that there are processes in place to monitor progress and expand on goals.<sup>29</sup>
- Grant writing:** Capturing supplemental funding will be important for your charter school, especially in the startup phase. Ensuring that you have the capabilities on your team to write grants effectively will be helpful in capturing governmental and nongovernmental grants. A study on starting charter schools revealed that most charter schools studied had a grant writer on staff or contracted one to secure grants.<sup>30</sup> Some Native American charter schools have brought on grant writers with tribal affiliations to ensure that this important role is personally invested in the outcomes of the charter school.

Figure 2 outlines the barriers that many founding teams encounter in building their funding capacity to support the opening and sustainability of a Native American charter school.

Figure 2: Common Challenges and Strategies for Building Funding Capacity

Common Challenges	Strategies to Overcome Challenges
<p><b>Insufficient funding:</b> As establishing and running a charter school requires extensive funding, schools often struggle with securing sufficient funding in the startup phase and beyond.</p>	<p><b>Diversify your revenue streams and consider the requirements for each.</b> Prioritize where you will spend time applying for supplemental funding and consider the burden of reporting requirements in seeking out additional funding streams. Some funding streams and financing options may be very costly to charter schools in the startup phase in terms of time and transaction costs.</p> <p><b>Map out timelines for when funding applications are due for federal and state grants.</b> Often, federal and state agencies provide pre-application or recorded webinars to assist with understanding the application process and the ongoing requirements of funding. If possible, find exemplary applications for the programs to which you would like to apply. Establish a contact so you can ask questions during the application and ongoing servicing of the funds.</p> <p><b>Ensure that foundation/corporate grants fit the mission and vision of your school—don’t create a program or activity to receive funding.</b> Understand the reporting requirements and other guidelines on using funds before applying and establish systems to track these funding and requirements early on.</p>

<sup>29</sup> See this [resource](#) for more information about goal setting and relationship building.

<sup>30</sup> Cannata et al., 2014



Common Challenges	Strategies to Overcome Challenges
<p><b>Facilities challenges:</b> Finding and acquiring facilities are a particular challenge for charter schools. Facility availability, fitness to serve schools, and costs all may create challenges for charter schools in general and especially during initiation.</p>	<p><b>Review whether your state or locality provides supports for facilities</b> and the requirements affiliated with these supports.<sup>31</sup></p> <p><b>It may make sense to find a temporary or incubator space initially and then grow into a more permanent space.</b> For charter schools growing by a grade each year, it may make sense to identify a temporary space for your school while you plan and gather the resources for a longer-term solution. Co-location with another school or organization may also help you identify an already established and lower-cost space for your school.<sup>32</sup></p> <p><b>Be wary of predatory lenders in the facilities space.</b> These lenders may disguise high rates or offer deceiving contracts to schools, tying them to high debt down the road.</p> <p><b>Create relationships with community development financial institutions (CDFIs).</b> If your school is interested in facilities financing, start discussions early with CDFIs to understand your options and the pros and cons of different financing options. Often, CDFIs provide technical assistance in navigating the financing process and ongoing financial operations. There are currently more than 70 <a href="#">certified Native CDFIs</a>, whose activities are directed toward serving Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Explore <a href="#">this dashboard</a> for examples of charter schools working with CDFIs to accomplish facilities deals.</p>
<p><b>Financial reporting:</b> Managing both governmental and nongovernmental funding requires proper accounting and reporting practices, which can be a challenge for charter schools, especially as many are receiving funding from a number of different revenue sources.</p>	<p><b>Ensure you set up systems to abide by the reporting and other requirements affiliated with each of your funding streams.</b> It may be helpful to hire a consultant or someone with financial expertise to ensure you are in compliance.</p>
<p><b>Sustainability:</b> A significant number of schools close for financial reasons, largely due to the lack of the financial capacity to effectively manage a budget, fundraise, or account for long-term financial needs. The nature of charter school funding, hinging on per-pupil revenue, makes it difficult to project long-term viability.</p>	<p><b>Make sure that while you are budgeting annually, you are also considering longer-term costs and how you will pay for them.</b> Think about startup costs versus annual or recurring costs. When applying for supplemental funding for programs or staff, think about what will happen when this funding ends. If you lose the money down the road, can you still fund these elements? In acquiring a facility, will your lease or debt payments increase beyond your ability to pay in future years? What is your plan for the school’s long-term curriculum development and the resources to sustain it? It’s a good idea to create a reserve fund, as charter school funding and enrollment can be uncertain from year to year.<sup>33</sup></p>

<sup>31</sup> Find out what kind of funding is provided for charter school facilities in your state in this [resource](#) by the Education Commission of the States.

<sup>32</sup> See this [resource](#) by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation for more guidance on securing startup funding and facilities.

<sup>33</sup> Cannata et al., 2014

## NATIVE AMERICAN CHARTER SCHOOL CASE STUDY:

### OVERCOMING FUNDING BARRIERS

Charter schools, although funded through public education monies, face a litany of barriers when developing, implementing, and sustaining rich educational experiences for their students, families, and communities. For these reasons, establishing spending priorities and creating avenues for long-term revenue streams are especially important. Both NACA and WHCS maintain that developing a clear mission and vision is a crucial component in understanding which programs are needed and how to financially sustain those programs.

Since its inception, NACA has primarily functioned with the support of funds provided through the State of New Mexico. However, to fulfill the school's needs, it must seek additional outside funding. Through the collaborative efforts of NACA founding team members, a group of essential foundations and philanthropic organizations were, and continue to be, engaged to provide ongoing funding to support NACA's mission and vision. Aligning funding with the evolving needs of NACA is vital to what NACA wants to accomplish for their educational community.

WHCS also obtains the bulk of their funding from the State of New Mexico; however, they seek to maximize and leverage their supplemental funding through adaptive and creative staffing and programming. Due to their small size and rural setting, they seek and advocate for staff to fulfill multiple roles within the school to defray operating costs.

Despite these varying approaches, both schools value the ability to bolster and enhance their staff through various funding streams. These additional funding streams ultimately enhance the professional experiences of their staff through intentional relationship and team building. Stronger relationships among their staff then lead to stronger relationships with the communities and members of the tribes that attend both schools.



# Building Compliance Capacity

As public entities, charter schools are subject to many legal and accountability requirements, which makes developing capacity for compliance important for new charter schools. Part of developing this capacity involves developing knowledge of your unique charter school landscape and fostering a relationship with your authorizer to understand requirements specific to your startup context. At the time of this publication, 45 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam have laws allowing charter schools to operate in their territories.<sup>34</sup> Charter school law is set at the state level, which impacts how many and what kind of charter schools are allowed in each state, who authorizes them, what processes and procedures charters must abide by for applying for or operating schools, and whether there is an appeals process for charter applications or revocation.<sup>35</sup> Some states have charter caps limiting the number of charter schools allowed to exist at one time in that state. Some states require charter schools to gain nonprofit status prior to operating.<sup>36</sup> For more on specific, state-level, charter policy, see NCSRC's [High-Quality Charter Authorizing Policy Profiles](#) or the National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) [National Policy Index](#).

Charter school authorizers hold charter schools accountable for educational outcomes and some operational aspects such as finances and governance. Prospective schools apply for their charters through the authorizer, and the authorizing body decides which charter schools to open. The charter agreement is between the school's governing board and the authorizer, detailing the areas in which the school will be held accountable. Authorizers grant charters for a specific number of years dependent on state law, at which point the school faces renewal, a process where the school must demonstrate why the authorizer should renew the school for additional years of operation. Authorizers decide whether to renew or revoke a school's charter, which would effectively close the charter school. Some states allow charter schools to appeal an authorizer's decision to revoke the charter.

The types of organizations eligible to serve as authorizers vary by state, but may include state education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), higher education institutions, independent chartering boards, noneducational government entities, and nonprofit organizations.<sup>37</sup> Charter schools on reservations are authorized by a range of authorizer types, most commonly by independent charter boards, LEAs, and SEAs.<sup>38</sup> Authorizing is different across and within states, as authorizers hold different philosophies around accountability versus autonomy. This means that authorizers will provide different levels of supports or interventions depending on how much they prioritize charter autonomy.

One significant challenge Native American charter schools may face is that they will likely have their own set of accountability metrics and definitions of success that may not align with those of the authorizer. Native American charter schools have priorities related to sovereignty, culture, language development, and community empowerment, which are not historically the standard priorities of an authorizer in evaluating a new school application or an existing school. Founders of Native American charter schools need to strike a balance between upholding the values of their communities while also meeting the accountability

<sup>34</sup> See more about which states have charter laws in this [resource](#) by NCSRC.

<sup>35</sup> See more about charter law by state in this [resource](#) by the Education Commission of the States.

<sup>36</sup> In addition, some states allow for-profit organizations to run charter schools.

<sup>37</sup> See which authorizers are allowed by law in your state in this [resource](#) by NACSA.

<sup>38</sup> Wolf & Sheridan-McIver, 2018

requirements set by their state and authorizer, which may be a point of tension throughout the charter school life cycle. Hence, it is critical to establish a relationship with the authorizer to communicate the values that your school will uphold, while also understanding the authorizer’s evaluation process.

Figure 3 outlines the barriers that many founding teams encounter in building their compliance capacity to support the opening and sustainability of a Native American charter school.

Figure 3: Common Challenges and Strategies for Building Compliance Capacity

Common Challenges	Strategies to Overcome Challenges
<p><b>Creating conditions for a supportive authorizer-school relationship:</b> As relationships between federal and state governing bodies and Native American groups have a troubled history, creating a supportive relationship with an authorizer is a challenge for many Native American groups seeking to start charter schools. In addition, communicating the value of non-traditional programs in the context of authorizer performance frameworks presents challenges to schools.</p>	<p><b>Gather background information on your authorizer.</b> Consider whether your authorizer has a history of authorizing Native American or culturally responsive schools. This may help you identify how to approach your relationship with the authorizer and any schools you may be able to connect with who can help facilitate this relationship or provide any helpful context.</p> <p><b>Develop a strategy for building the type of relationship you want with your authorizer.</b><sup>39</sup> Identify how your school is serving an unmet need in the community and plan how you will communicate that. In your application and in ongoing discussions with your authorizer, clearly demonstrate the need for the school within your community and tribal context.</p>
<p><b>Understanding compliance:</b> Different authorizers have different reporting requirements. In addition, charter schools must ensure that they are following relevant federal and state laws and regulations (e.g., serving students with disabilities and requirements for staff certifications, respectively).</p>	<p><b>Identify where to find information on legal and compliance requirements for your context.</b> This can often be found on the authorizer or state education agency’s website. These websites may also provide you with an email or phone contact to reach out for additional clarifications.</p> <p><b>Develop an understanding of both the requirements for startup and ongoing operations of your school.</b> Are you required to abide by an open meetings policy? How many of your teachers must be certified? Will your school be required to pay a fee to the authorizer? If there are questions about compliance that you can’t answer, identify another charter school or support organization who can help.</p> <p><b>Identify how your school will be evaluated in terms of academics, governance, and finance by the authorizer.</b> Build this into your planning for school operations. How can you align your school programming and operations to accomplish the standards set by the authorizer? Highlight this alignment in your charter application and discussions with the authorizer.</p> <p><b>Understand the waiver process with your authorizer for measures that don’t align with your school design.</b> In some states, waivers can be granted for such things as standards-based assessments, academic growth, or language-based assessment if you have, for example, a language program.</p>
<p><b>Opportunity for appeal:</b> If a charter application is denied, is there an opportunity for appeal?</p>	<p><b>Review your state’s charter law and the authorizer application process.</b> What happens when an authorizer denies a school’s application? Are there opportunities to improve your application or to appeal? Does the authorizer provide any supports during the application process? This process differs from state to state.<sup>40</sup> It may be helpful to network with other Native American schools and organizations with success or knowledge in the area.</p>

<sup>39</sup> See pages 57–62 for more on building an authorizer relationship in this [resource](#) by the Illinois Network of Charter Schools.

<sup>40</sup> Find out if your state allows an appeals process for charter applicants in this [report](#) by the Education Commission of the States.

## NATIVE AMERICAN CHARTER SCHOOL CASE STUDY:

### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUTHORIZERS

NACA and WHCS had two distinctly different paths in finding their current authorizer. While NACA was and remains a district charter school under the authorizing authority of Albuquerque Public Schools (APS), WHCS started as a district charter school, but transitioned to, and remains, a state-chartered school under the authorizing authority of the State of New Mexico Public Education Commission. The schools' relationships with their charter school authorizers vary.

As a district-authorized school, NACA continues to value its partnership with APS. At its inception, APS initiated an "equity council," which was vital in utilizing Native American-centric data to justify the need for a Native American educational experience that sought to engage the needs of Native American students living within the APS district. Consequently, APS understood the unique and unmet needs of Native Americans within their school district and saw how NACA could provide more equitable learning opportunities for Native American students and families. The authorizing of a Native American charter school would provide the school with a direct connection to the Native American community, while allowing for an equitable and diverse educational experience for the various Native American tribes represented within the APS district.

WHCS initially began as a district-chartered school and later transitioned to a state-chartered school. WHCS viewed the district-charter school designation as a good start, but saw limits in the district-charter school model. Under the authorizing authority of the school district, WHCS was not supported by all within the school district. WHCS sought to integrate curricular and instructional methods that were aligned with community and tribal knowledge through culturally and linguistically responsive means, but found that support within the district for the school's programs was lacking. Although the state authorizer imposed more regulatory processes and greater requirements to demonstrate academic growth, it provided WHCS with the autonomy to be creative with the methods and means by which they deliver educational opportunities.

Regardless of authorizer type, both schools continue to adapt the way that education is delivered and how growth and academic progress can be attained and demonstrated through qualitative and quantitative measures.



# Interconnectedness: The Importance of Building Relationships Throughout the Ecosystem

As a charter school is a public school of choice, Native American charter school founders must establish relationships with those in their surrounding community and the charter ecosystem, including non-Native governing bodies and charter support organizations (CSOs).<sup>41</sup> CSOs operate in certain states and can be helpful allies as they advocate for charter schools, provide support during the application process, and provide technical assistance and talent development throughout the life cycle of a charter school. Building relationships with other charter schools that serve predominantly Native Americans can also be helpful, as leaders in these schools can share valuable lessons learned.<sup>42</sup>

Native American charter schools are often faced with engaging entities that may not fully understand Native American educational best practices, concepts, considerations, and theory. Terms such as *culturally and linguistically responsive education; community-based education; Indigenous methods, methodology, and pedagogy; and inclusive learning environments* may not be familiar to entities whose buy-in is required for success. It is important to be prepared to define and provide foundational understandings for concepts and terms that the school may be utilizing in their educational programs.

In addition, mainstream, non-Native American entities may not understand the need and desire for a community and/or tribe to shift to a new educational system. It is important to explain how education and educational opportunities have historically impacted the culture, language, and traditions of the community and/or tribe and to highlight how a new charter school model will benefit and enhance the educational attainment and opportunities for Native American students. By creating intentional and collaborative relationships, understandings and commitments can be forged. Many non-Native entities may not understand or view education in the same way Native Americans view education. However, by providing explicit foundational knowledge, governing bodies and charter support organizations can better understand and support founding teams' vision for a new school. Many charter schools produce promotional materials, such as brochures, to effectively communicate their school's mission with potential partners.

Figure 4 lists some of the benefits and challenges associated with establishing relationships with members of the broader charter environment. Each of the groups in the table can provide access to vital resources, expertise, social capital, or political capital essential for founding a charter school.

<sup>41</sup> The National Alliance of Public Charter Schools has generated [a list of CSOs](#) by state.

<sup>42</sup> See [resources](#) provided by the NACA Inspired Schools Network for more guidance on Native American charter schools.

Figure 4: Key Relationships Across the Charter School Ecosystem

Relationships with...	Benefits	Challenges
Other charter school leaders	<p>Leaders of established Native American charter schools can share lessons learned from founding and operating beyond the startup phase, including evaluation, maintaining sufficient funding, and securing student enrollment.</p> <p>Leaders can also provide advice and troubleshooting on shared challenges.</p> <p>Charter school leaders can help you identify resources and put you in contact with key stakeholders.</p>	<p>It may be difficult to identify schools facing similar challenges.</p> <p>It can be difficult and time-consuming to connect with busy school leaders.</p>
Local school district	<p>Local school districts can provide resources for student enrollment and funding.</p> <p>Collaboration with the local district can facilitate coordinated or shared services for students with disabilities, English learners, food services, transportation services, and facilities and recreational spaces.</p>	<p>A sense of “competition” among schools for the same students may hinder collaboration.</p> <p>Political tensions can lead to adversarial relationships between charter schools, traditional public schools, community members, and parents if the values of the charter school and the community don’t align.</p> <p>Historical relationships between Native and non-Native governing bodies have made trusting local authorities difficult for many Native communities.</p>
State education agency (SEA)	<p>Developing a positive relationship with a state education agency can help connect you to contacts who can answer questions about policy, compliance, and funding at the state level.</p> <p>Some SEAs provide grant programs for developing charter schools.</p> <p>SEAs can be authorizers who can provide insight on the charter application, approval, and renewal processes.</p>	<p>Historical relationships between Native and non-Native governing bodies are often fraught with distrust.</p> <p>Some SEAs may not initially understand the cultural values of a Native American charter school and will require ongoing education on the school’s mission and approach.</p>
Charter authorizer	<p>Maintaining a positive relationship with the authorizer is especially important, as they evaluate the charter; your authorizer can be your greatest advocate.</p> <p>Creating an open and positive relationship with your authorizer can help the authorizer understand the culture and mission of your charter school, which is essential for Native American charter schools that emphasize culture, language, identity, and heritage in addition to academics.</p> <p>The authorizer can provide the school with additional avenues of support and resources.</p> <p>Building this foundation early can support the school’s long-term sustainability while navigating the accountability and compliance process.</p>	<p>It can be challenging to develop trusting relationships with authorities who evaluate your school and determine its status, particularly if an authorizer is not fully supportive of your school’s mission.</p> <p>Some authorizers can also provide technical assistance in addition to evaluation, which can make these relationships even more complex. It is important to understand what services authorizers can provide.</p>

Relationships with...	Benefits	Challenges
<p>Charter support organizations (CSOs)</p>	<p>CSOs can advocate for charter schools before state legislatures.</p> <p>CSOs can connect charter schools to workshops, professional development, resources, partners, and startup incubation resources.</p> <p>CSOs can connect your school to charter school networks in the state.</p> <p>CSOs can provide guidance on the charter school application process, as they often have knowledge of past applications that have succeeded or failed.</p>	<p>Some states do not have CSOs.</p> <p>CSOs vary in capacity, and some require membership and dues. It is important to understand the CSOs in your state and how they can support your school.</p>
<p>Community members, families, and/or tribal leaders</p>	<p>Community buy-in for new schools is vital, especially when the school aims to develop Indigenous culture and identity. The local community can be one of your strongest advocates.</p> <p>Community members can become active and empowered stakeholders in the charter school's direction.</p> <p>Community members and leaders may have access to additional untapped resources and partnerships for the school.</p> <p>See <a href="#">Planning for Family Engagement in the Charter School Life Cycle: A Toolkit for School Leaders</a> for more about the benefits of community engagement and how to build a comprehensive, schoolwide plan.</p>	<p>Local intolerance for charter schools can make some communities wary of supporting a charter school.</p>
<p>Funders and philanthropists</p>	<p>These groups can bring additional revenues and resources essential for founding a charter school.</p>	<p>Connecting with funders and philanthropists can require substantial time and investment. It can also take time to translate the school vision into language that will connect with philanthropic leaders.</p>



# Strategies for Creating a System of Supports

Given the many tasks required to found a charter school—from securing facilities and startup funds to hiring a school leader—it is essential that you form relationships with various stakeholders, members of the community, financial institutions, and charter authorizers. Effective charter school founders leverage the school mission and the values and needs of the communities being served to form relationships that strengthen the charter. On the following page are some strategies for relationship building.

## Strategies for Relationship Building

1

### Conduct a needs assessment to identify the most pressing needs of the community.

- a. Create a community outreach and engagement plan to gather community input on student needs and feedback on the school vision.
- b. Ensure your school's mission is aligned with the community's needs.
- c. Identify the school's goals stemming from community needs that extend beyond your current capacity to address.

2

### Identify key stakeholders and tribal leaders who can help.

- a. Map out what relationships and connections the founding team and other stakeholders already have. Are founding members already connected to key resources?
- b. Conduct a landscape scan based on your goals to map out additional key stakeholders.
- c. Make a plan to connect with stakeholders who can help you meet your school's needs.

3

### Tell your story to build relationships.<sup>43</sup>

- a. Develop promotional materials that communicate your school's mission.
- b. Organize talking points to help with fundraising, recruitment, and community engagement around the school's mission, the community's needs, and the value the school would bring to the surrounding communities.
- c. Share why you are interested in establishing a relationship/partnership and how the relationship can be mutually beneficial.

4

### Maintain your system of support.

- a. Map out strategies to sustain engagement with individuals and organizations who can support your schools (e.g., informally, meetings, social media, networking events).
- b. Consider the time and resources that may be necessary to sustain partnerships.
- c. Delineate clear roles, expectations, and routines to ensure that the partnership will support your school, the communities being served, and the partner organization.

<sup>43</sup> For more guidance on leveraging community assets, refer to this [guide](#) authored by NCSRC.

# Closing

Native American charter schools provide Native American communities and tribes an opportunity to engage and reimagine what education can look like when provided through a Native American lens. As Anapao Duta-Flying Earth, former executive director for Native American Community Academy, stated, “I believe the time is now for the articulation of schools that are based in Indigenous history [and] Indigenous culture.” Native American charter schools provide the means for Native American communities, families, students, and tribes to realize an

education that adheres and aligns to the specific needs of each community and tribe. Although this document is not a comprehensive, step-by-step guide, it does provide a starting point for community and tribal stakeholders to begin envisioning and realizing an education that is intentionally taught through the local cultures and languages, as well as being aligned with community and tribal beliefs, knowledge ways, and values. Benny Shendo Jr., from Jemez Pueblo and current New Mexico state senator, states, “Now that we are in a position where we can actually control what is important to us, we are trying to take a balanced approach, and how do we integrate what is important without compromising who we are as people?” Native American charter schools are one way to preserve this balance through developing schools that embody Native American values and cultures while also preparing students for postsecondary success.<sup>44</sup>

**“These types of schools [Native American charter schools] are so important because they allow our kids to celebrate their culture while being kids in the 20th century.”**

–Teri Bissonette, Head of School at the newly created American Indian Academy of Denver\*

\* City and County of Denver, 2019



<sup>44</sup> Irwin, 2019

# Additional Resources

- ❖ [Sovereignty in Education: Creating Culturally-Based Charter Schools in Native Communities](#)
- ❖ [NACA Inspired Schools Network and NACA Inspired Schools Network Resource Hub](#)
- ❖ [Native Nations and American Schools: The History of Natives in the American Education System](#)
- ❖ [Tribal Leaders Toolkit: Education Choice for Indian Country: Supporting Tribal Decision Making for Schools and Students](#)
- ❖ [Starting Strong: Best Practices in Starting a Charter School](#)
- ❖ [School Quality Assessment: Where Are You on the Pathway to Success?](#)
- ❖ [Planning for Family Engagement in the Charter School Life Cycle: A Toolkit for School Leaders](#)
- ❖ [High-Quality Charter Authorizing Policy Profiles](#)
- ❖ [50-State Comparison: Charter School Policies](#)
- ❖ [Charter School Facility Financing: Start-Up Schools](#)
- ❖ [New Schools Check List Webinar](#)
- ❖ [Colorado League of Charter Schools: Resources for Starting a Charter School in Colorado](#)



# Appendix A

## Federal Funding Detail

Key Federal Funding Sources				
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, Part B)	Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (ESEA Title I, Part A)	Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants (Title II, Part A)	English Language Acquisition State Grants (Title III, Part A)	Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education Grants (Title VI)
Provides funding to support the instruction of students with disabilities.	Provides funding to schools to support staffing and programming for students from low-income families. This funding is provided at different levels depending on the percentage of students from low-income families.	Formula grants are provided to LEAs for supporting professional development activities.	Provides funding to help schools implement language instruction programs to support English learners achieving state education standards.	The Office of Indian Education (OIE) provides a number of grants for LEAs serving Native students, including the <a href="#">Indian Education Formula Grant</a> , which provides funding to LEAs in support of programs serving Native students. <sup>45</sup>

## Additional Federal Funding Programs for Supplemental Funding

- The [Office of Formula Grants for Rural, Insular, and Native Achievement Programs \(RINAP\)](#) houses grant programs for the development of curricula and educational programs that address the needs of Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students.
- The [United States Department of Health and Human Services Active Grants in Native Languages – Esther Martinez Immersion](#) provides grants to community-based projects for the continuity of Native languages through immersion-based instruction.
- The [United States Department of Agriculture’s Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program](#) offers funding and financing for essential community facilities in rural areas, including for charter school buildings.

<sup>45</sup> Provides funding to LEAs in support of programs serving Native students.

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